

## Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers May 2003

### Average Cost of Driving a Car in the US Rose by the Largest Amount in Three Years

According to AAA, the average cost of driving a car in the US rose by the largest amount in three years due to higher gasoline and insurance costs. The average costs associated with driving a new car in 2003 increased 1.5 cents per mile from a year ago to 51.7 cents per mile, the largest gain since 2000, when driving costs surged 2.1 cents to 49.1 cents per mile. Operating costs for owning a car, including gasoline, oil, maintenance and tires increased 1.3 cents from 11.8 cents to 13.1 cents per mile, mostly due to higher prices for gasoline. Cost figures were based on a composite average of three domestically built 2003 cars, including a small, mid-sized, and full-sized vehicle.

### Legislation Introduced to Require Rollover Testing to Improve Van Safety

Responding to safety concerns resulting from deadly accidents involving 15-passenger vans, U.S. Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) has introduced legislation to improve van safety by requiring rollover testing, advanced technological systems testing, and closing loopholes which put school children at risk. Last year, the government renewed a safety warning for 15-passenger vans and NHTSA found that, when carrying 10 or more people, these vans are more likely to roll over than lightly loaded vans. About 500,000 15-passenger vans are in use on U.S. highways and according to NHTSA, such vans were involved in more than 260 crashes between 1990 and 2000, resulting in more than 420 deaths. S.717 requires NHTSA to include 15-passenger vans in their dynamic rollover testing program, and to include 15-passenger vans in their New Car Assessment Program (NCAP) rollover resistance program. The bill also prohibits the leasing, renting or buying of a 15-passenger van if there is reason to know that the vehicle will be used significantly to transport preprimary, primary, and secondary school students to or from school or an event related to school. This extends the current ban from sale of vans to leasing, renting and buying. This is intended to make the buyers accountable as well as the seller. **For more information, visit the NHTSA website at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hot/15PassVans/index.htm>.**

### Results from Frontal Offset Crash Tests Indicate Automakers are Designing Safer Vehicles, According to IIHS

A recent series of six frontal offset crash tests by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety included three 2003 model SUVs plus three large luxury cars. All three SUVs earned good overall ratings and "best pick" designations. Two of the large luxury cars, also earned good ratings and are "best picks." These results "are good news. Five out of six vehicles we tested are good performers, and all five of them also earn our 'best pick' designation," says Institute president Brian O'Neill. "We haven't had a poor or a marginal performer in our frontal offset crash test program since 2001. These new results provide further evidence that auto manufacturers are designing safer vehicles." Vehicle ratings reflect performance in 40-mph frontal offset crash tests into a deformable barrier. Based on the results, the Institute evaluates the crashworthiness of passenger vehicles, assigning each vehicle a rating from good overall to poor. **For more information, visit IIHS' website at [http://www.highwaysafety.org/news\\_releases/2003/pr041603.htm](http://www.highwaysafety.org/news_releases/2003/pr041603.htm).**

### Newly Released Survey Findings from NHTSA May Yield Better Understanding of Driver Behaviors

Newly released NHTSA reports present findings from studies to better understand drivers' behaviors and attitudes regarding speeding, unsafe driving, distracted and drowsy driving. Volume I: Findings—National Survey of Distracted and Drowsy Driving reports respondent's behaviors and attitudes on various topics related to distracted and drowsy driving. Volume II: Findings—Speeding and Unsafe Driving presents the data on those topics, while Volume III: Methods Report describes the methods used to conduct the interviews and analyze the data and also contains the questionnaires. The data will be used to help identify the extent to which potentially distracting behaviors are undertaken by drivers and to understand the characteristics of those engaging in these behaviors so that programs can be developed to reduce these behaviors where they have been shown to be dangerous. The data come from two surveys each conducted among nationally representative samples of drivers during the spring of 2002. Interviews were conducted with a total of 4,010 drivers in the U.S. **For more information, visit NHTSA's website at [http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/drowsy\\_driving1/distracted03/DISTRACTEDFINALFINDINGS%20REPORT.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/drowsy_driving1/distracted03/DISTRACTEDFINALFINDINGS%20REPORT.pdf).**

### The Nationwide Price of Self-Serve Regular Gasoline Dropped 12 Cents per Gallon Last Month

The nationwide average price of self-serve regular gasoline has dropped an average of 12 cents per gallon since mid-March, reflecting a significant decline in crude oil prices since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, AAA's daily online Fuel Gauge Report shows. AAA said the recent downward trend in gasoline prices would increase consumer interest in planning late spring and summer driving vacations. As of Tuesday, the nationwide average price of self-serve regular gasoline was \$1.595 per gallon. This is the lowest nationwide average price recorded by AAA since February 10 of this year when the price was \$1.571 per gallon. In mid-March, just prior to the start of combat in Iraq, the nationwide average price was \$1.715. AAA said the drop in gasoline prices reflects a nearly 25 percent decline in the price of crude oil since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Crude oil prices reached almost \$40 per barrel prior to the war and are less than \$30 today. The national average prices for self-serve regular unleaded gasoline for AAA's mid-April survey for the last five years are: 2002, \$1.418; 2001, \$1.587; 2000, \$1.489; 1999, \$1.15; and 1998, \$1.079.

### The Hartford Financial Services Group Finds Worker Injury Top Concern of American Business Owners

Worker injury is a top concern of many American business owners, a new survey by The Hartford Financial Services Group revealed. The research found that, when it comes to situations covered by insurance, three out of four businesses with up to 500 employees are either worried or very worried about workplace accidents, said Pamela Rippens, senior vice president and director of field operations for Specialty Risk Services (SRS), The Hartford's third-party claims administrator. Businesses' concerns about workplace injuries are not surprising, considering that 54 percent of the respondents have had at least one workplace injury in the past three years. Of those reporting accidents, 91 percent said they were worried about future accidents. Interestingly, 73 percent, nearly the same number of businesses that are worried about workplace injuries, offer temporary alternative assignments to employees injured on the job who cannot perform their normal duties. But only one-third of those has a formal return-to-work policy. "Transitional employment is an important part of managing worker injuries and claims," said Rippens. "When you identify a choice of medically appropriate jobs and get injured employees back to the workplace in meaningful work, you help them

recover much faster. It all comes down to home recovery versus recovery on the job - and the job serves a worker's long-term interests better."

### **Safe Smart Women, a New Non-Profit Organization to Improve Women's Driving Safety Knowledge**

Ž Safe Smart Women, a new non-profit organization, has been created to improve women's driving safety knowledge through education, experience, and empowerment. Kristin Backstrom and Anne Sessions created the organization to ensure that young women are not left out of the "car dialogue." The organization's board of directors includes highway safety community leaders such as Peter Kissinger, president and CEO of the AAA Foundation; Heather Paul, executive director of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign; and Paul Jones, senior advisor to the administrator of NHTSA. They want women to drive with a sense of safety and confidence. The new organization plans to offer personal and car safety ideas, as well as hands-on strategies to help young women be safe drivers.

### **The Canadian Traffic Injury Research Foundation Reports Findings that 3.7 Million Canadians Admitted to Driving After Taking Drugs**

As many as 3.7 million Canadians admitted to driving after taking drugs in the past year, according to new report by the Canadian Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF). Almost 18 percent of survey respondents said they drove within two hours of taking some type of potentially impairing drug during the past 12 months. Most survey respondents reported driving after taking over-the-counter medications. Relatively few reported driving after taking prescription drugs or marijuana or other illegal drugs. Canadians rank driving while impaired by illegal drugs as second only to drinking and driving in terms of serious road safety problems. **For more information on the Road Safety Monitor, an annual survey by TIRF, visit [www.trafficinjuryresearch.com](http://www.trafficinjuryresearch.com).**

### **The National Transportation Safety Board Held Public Hearing Recently on Medical Oversight of Non-Commercial Drivers**

During a recent public hearing on medical oversight of non-commercial drivers, the National Transportation Safety Board explored various safety issues. The hearing examined:

- potentially impairing or debilitating medical conditions that might affect a person's ability to drive
- current procedures for collecting and routing information on medically high-risk drivers to licensing authorities and medical review boards
- effectiveness of state oversight of licensed drivers who suffer from potentially impairing or debilitating medical conditions

**For more information on the hearing, visit the NTSB website at [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov).**